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A statement in support of SB 46
COMMISSION AND OFFICE OF EASTERN EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
by George Vredeveld, Prof of Economics, Emeritus

I strongly support SB46 and the establishment of a Commission and Office of Eastern European Affairs. The Commission will benefit Ohio in many ways, but I will limit my remarks to my area of expertise – the economy.

The most important factor affecting the vitality of any region's economy is the size and quality of its workforce. An aging population, lower fertility rates and a lower percentage of residents who are working present threats to a healthy economy. Legal immigration has been, and will continue to be, essential in overcoming a decrease in the size of America's population and workforce.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 13.7 percent of American residents are foreign-born. Ohio is losing out; its percentage is only 4.3 percent.

SB46 will enable a strategy that will grow our workforce by attracting the energy and talent that flows from foreign-born citizens. The Commission would ramp up efforts to facilitate the integration of Eastern European immigrants into Ohio by strengthening connections to existing social services and address longer term integration and retention issues. We know that immigrants tend to seek places where they have contacts and are immigrant friendly. Ohio is the home for many citizens of Eastern European heritage and the Commission, through its efforts to engage these immigrants more thoroughly, will develop valuable public relations agents to attract other immigrants to Ohio.

In brief, Ohio could be promoted as an ideal place for Eastern European immigrants to participate in our economy.

Some things to consider:

- Immigrants participate in the U.S. labor force at a higher rate than native-born Americans.
- Immigrants are more likely to own businesses than natural-born Americans,
- Eastern European immigrants tend to be better educated than native born citizens. In Ohio, 42 percent of adult immigrants had a college degree compared to 32 percent for natural born Americans.
- Roughly one-third of immigrants who arrived in 2017 were professionals or technical workers (engineers, doctors, lawyers).